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A REVIEW OF STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL

CIA Round Table

March 24, 1978

PARTICIPANTS: George Bush, Ray Cline, W.
Colby, Richard Helms, and Michael Ledeen

LEDEEN: What is CIA good for? Why do we need it?

BUSH: Let me answer it in the context of the times we are living in: Armed powers who have closed societies and are not open with their information are acting in ways that in my view are potentially dangerous for the survival of the free world. It is essential that our policymakers be provided with as much information about the intent of these powers as is possible. An open society like ours hands hostile governments virtually everything that exists about our strategic forces, tactical forces, and intents, while we're asked to play the game without corresponding information about our enemies. Good intelligence is therefore absolutely essential.

CLINE: You include political intent, not just military intent, don't you?

BUSH: Absolutely.

COLBY: I don't think you'd even ask why the CIA is needed if, instead of using the word "intelligence," you'd use the word "knowledge." The objective of intelligence is to gain knowledge and nobody doubts the importance of knowledge. Obviously knowledge is essential to meet all kinds of political, economic, sociological, military, and strategic problems. If you know about them, you can defend yourself, you can take actions which deter a hostile action against you. Best of all, you can lay the problems out on the negotiating table and you can discuss it with the other side and you can come to a solution, as in the case of the ABM treaty. For years and years we were trying to get a handle on nuclear weapons, trying to get rid of them by mutual agreement. We talked about a program of open skies during the Eisenhower period so that we could inspect on each side. Soviet aircraft would fly over America and American aircraft over the Soviet Union; that way we'd both be sure that the other side was complying. But the Soviets didn't agree.

CLINE: I was there. When President Eisenhower made that proposal, Chip Bohlen said the Soviets responded, "You guys are proposing a system of espionage against the Soviet Union. We can't tolerate such espionage. It is not possible."